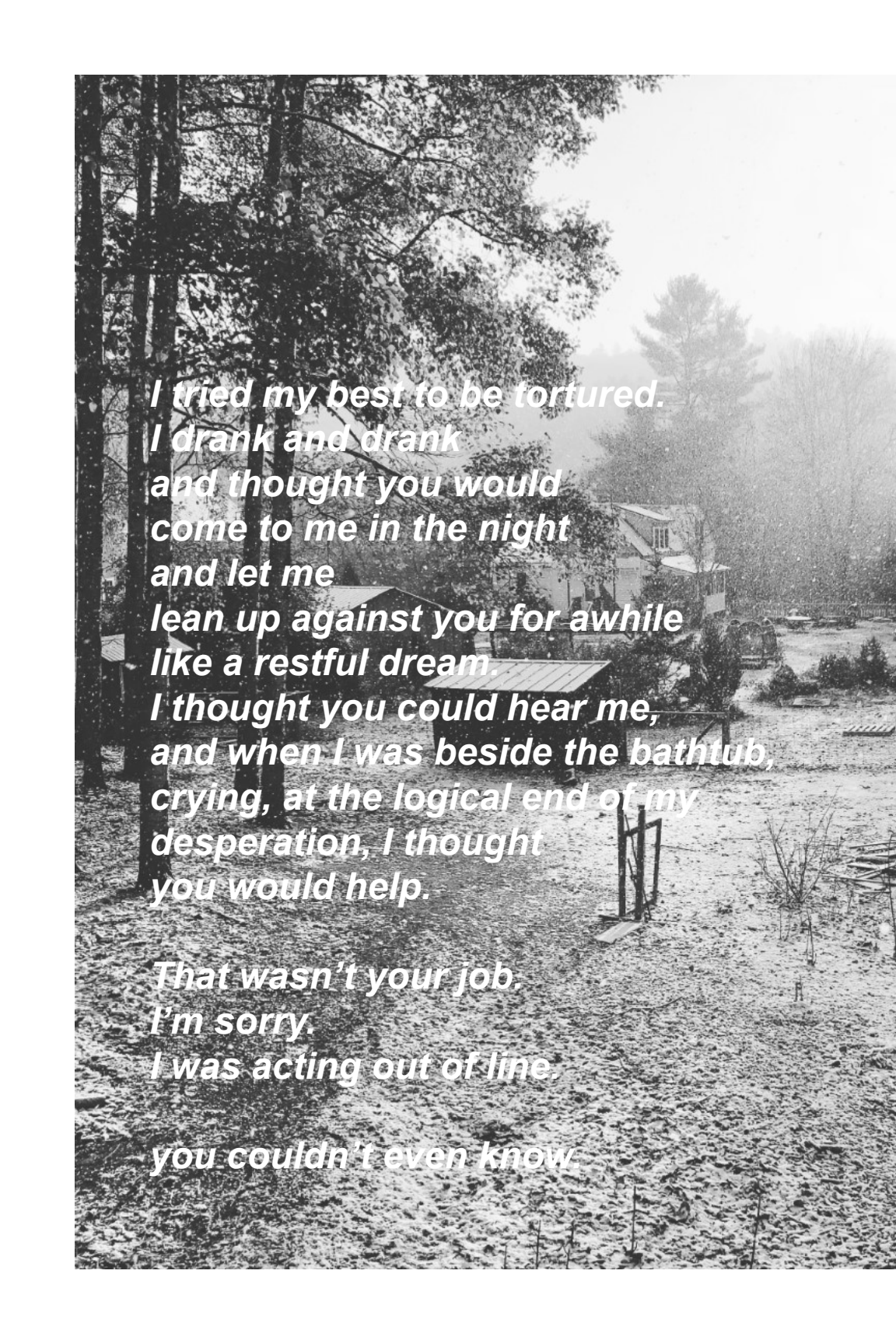


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THANK YOU TO ALL SUPPORTERS, READERS, FRIENDS, AND
FAMILY MEMBERS.

contact: jovialtorchlightbooks@gmail.com

A black and white photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, there is a field with some sparse vegetation and a small wooden structure. In the middle ground, a house with a chimney and a barn are visible. The background is filled with tall trees, some of which are bare, suggesting a late autumn or winter setting. The sky is overcast.

*I tried my best to be tortured.
I drank and drank
and thought you would
come to me in the night
and let me
lean up against you for awhile
like a restful dream.
I thought you could hear me,
and when I was beside the bathtub,
crying, at the logical end of my
desperation, I thought
you would help.*

*That wasn't your job.
I'm sorry.
I was acting out of line.
you couldn't even know.*

where was i when
you called?
where was i when
your body met the edge of life and fell into death?



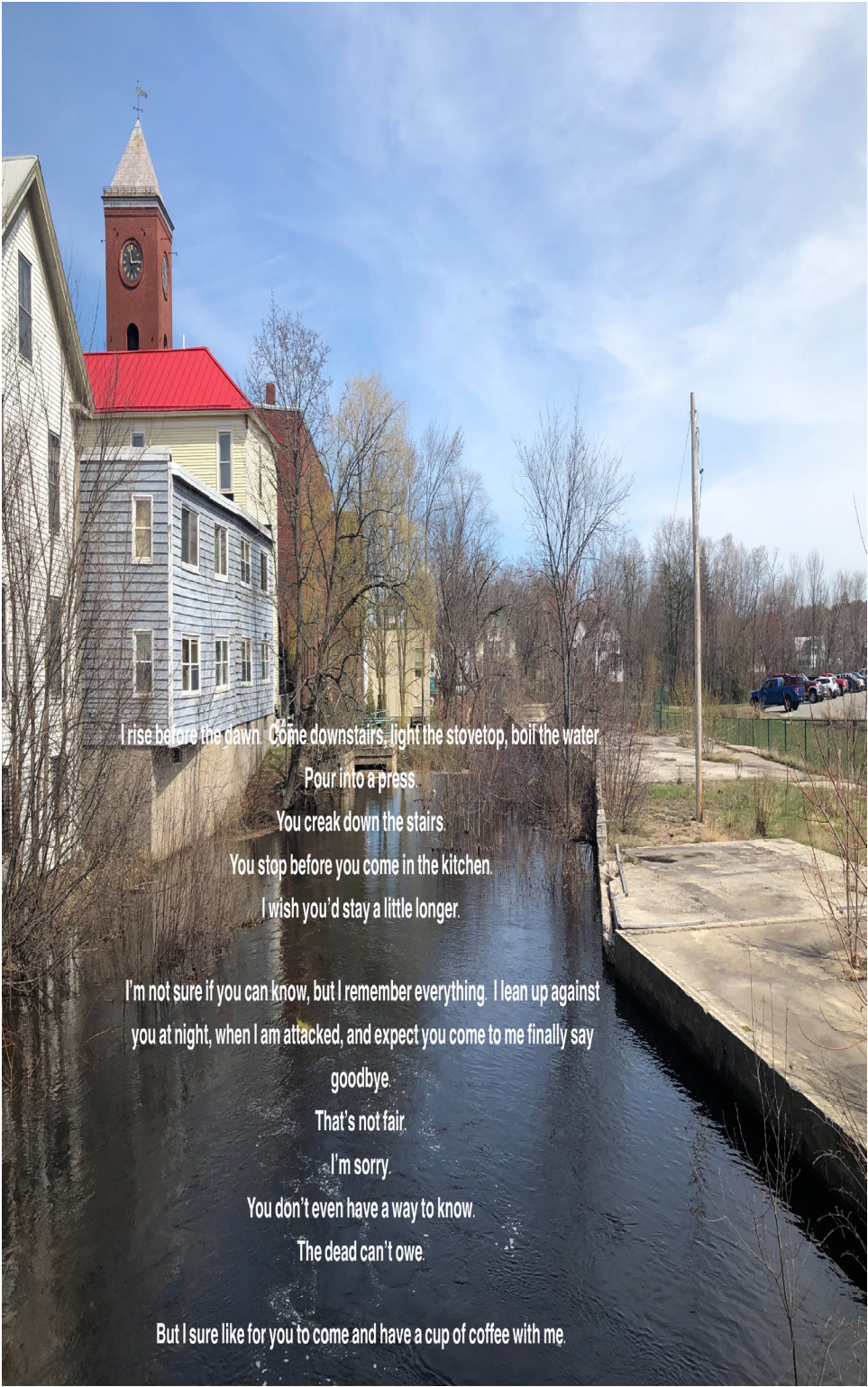
These thoughts carry me off into
darkness, through a strange land,
teetering on the edge of death.

The mind is a strange vehicle.

I hope I know when I've arrived.

A WARNING.

When you progress towards the center, it gets a bit harder to solve.
The riddle gets tougher.
Clues obscured by sadness.

A photograph of a flooded street in front of a building with a red clock tower. The water is dark and reflects the sky and the building. Bare trees are in the foreground, and a parking lot with several cars is visible in the background under a blue sky with light clouds.

I rise before the dawn. Come downstairs, light the stove-top, boil the water.

Pour into a press.

You creak down the stairs.

You stop before you come in the kitchen.

I wish you'd stay a little longer.

I'm not sure if you can know, but I remember everything. I lean up against
you at night, when I am attacked, and expect you come to me finally say
goodbye.

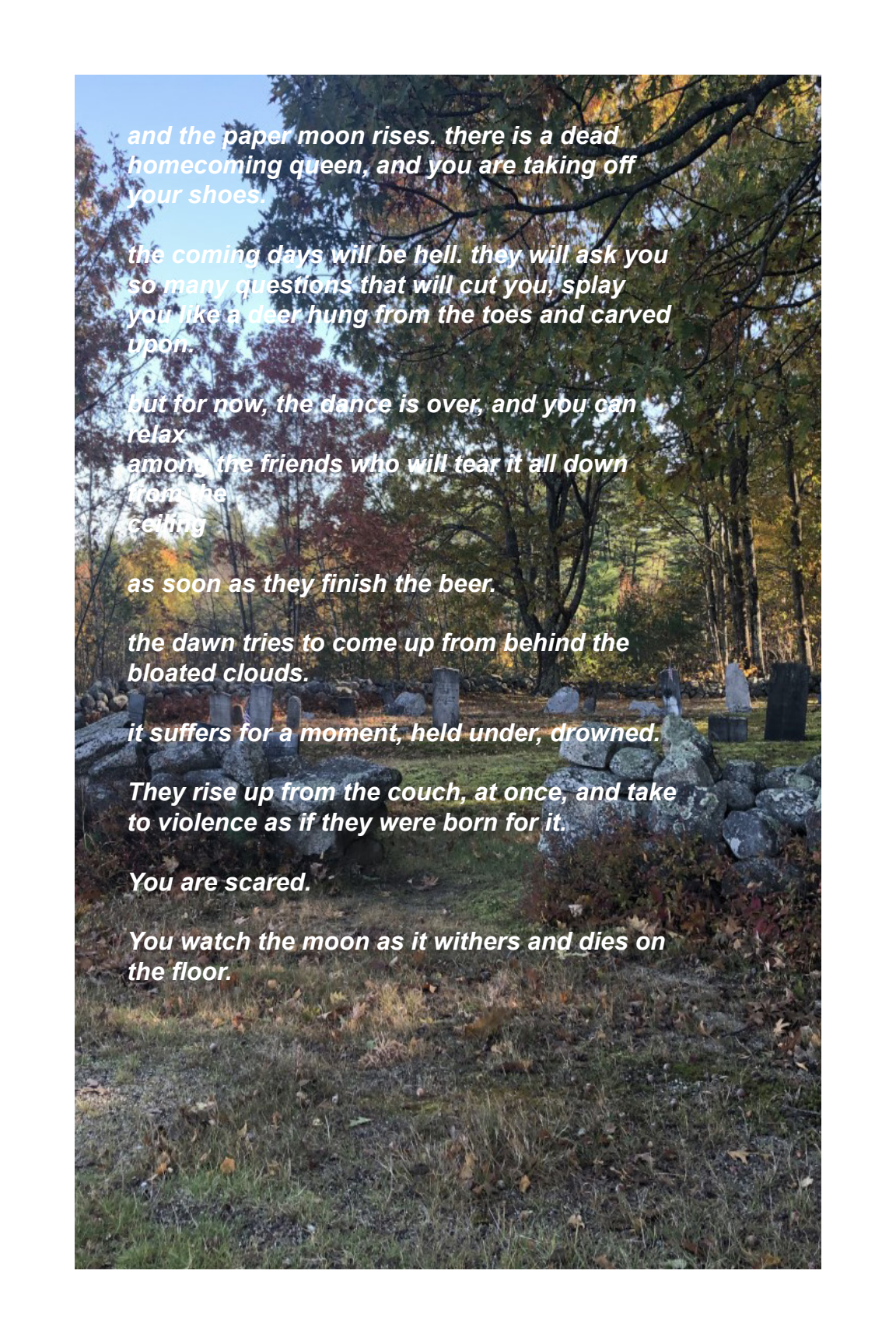
That's not fair.

I'm sorry.

You don't even have a way to know.

The dead can't owe.

But I sure like for you to come and have a cup of coffee with me.

A photograph of a cemetery with tombstones and trees with autumn foliage. The scene is set in a wooded area with trees displaying vibrant autumn colors of red, orange, and yellow. Several tombstones of various shapes and sizes are scattered across a grassy field. The ground is covered with fallen leaves and some patches of grass. The sky is visible through the branches of the trees, showing a clear blue color.

*and the paper moon rises. there is a dead
homecoming queen, and you are taking off
your shoes.*

*the coming days will be hell. they will ask you
so many questions that will cut you, splay
you like a deer hung from the toes and carved
upon.*

*but for now, the dance is over, and you can
relax*

*among the friends who will tear it all down
from the
ceiling*

as soon as they finish the beer.

*the dawn tries to come up from behind the
bloated clouds.*

it suffers for a moment, held under, drowned.

*They rise up from the couch, at once, and take
to violence as if they were born for it.*

You are scared.

*You watch the moon as it withers and dies on
the floor.*

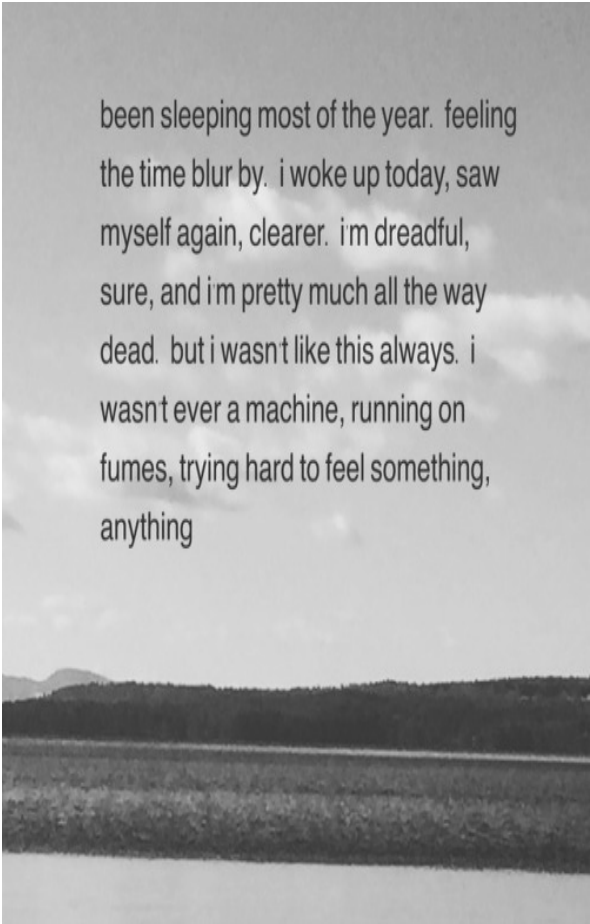
*it's not shameful to lose
a conversation.
playing equally, logic, and some sad
diplomacy, reasoning.*

*but everyone has to lose eventually,
and it's not like the words stick.*

*right after you speak them,
they float away like steam.*

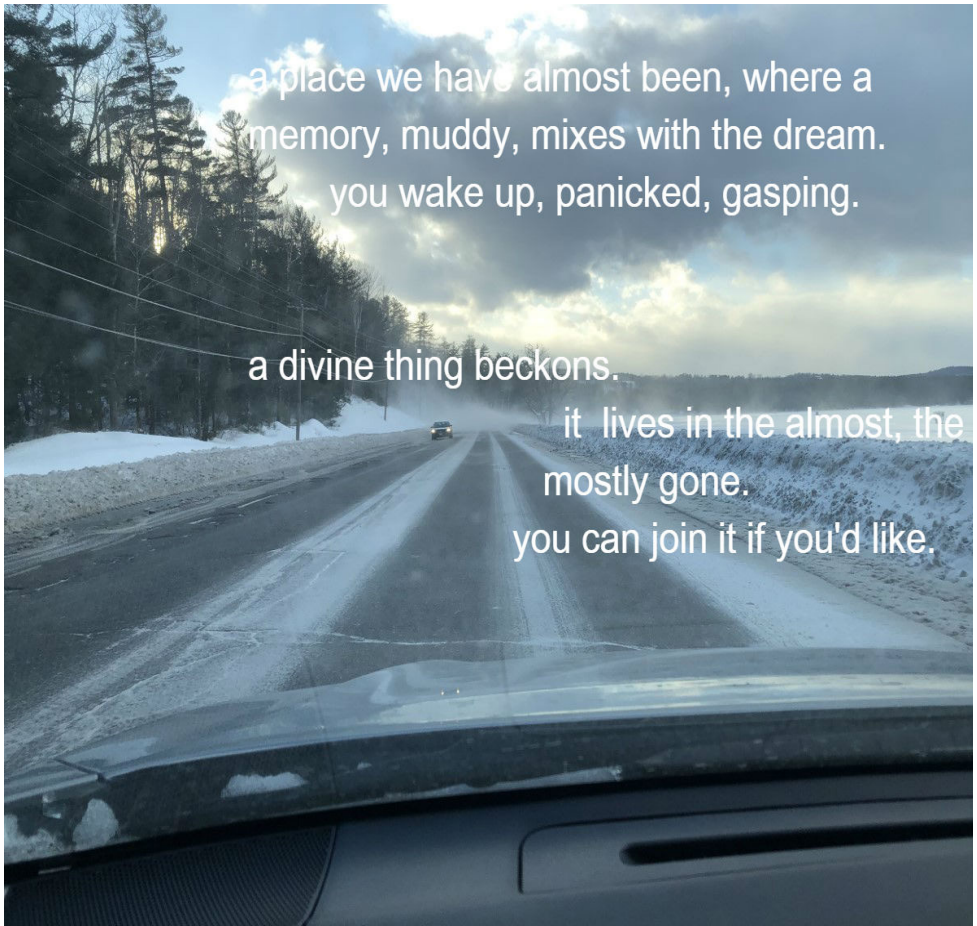


three beautiful things.
a homecoming
a dead best friend
a plastic moon ripped from the ceiling.



been sleeping most of the year. feeling
the time blur by. i woke up today, saw
myself again, clearer. i'm dreadful,
sure, and i'm pretty much all the way
dead. but i wasn't like this always. i
wasn't ever a machine, running on
fumes, trying hard to feel something,
anything

AND THE RIVER WILL FLOOD THE BANK. AND THE
RIVER WILL FLOOD THE BANK. AND THE RIVER WILL
FLOOD THE BANK. AND THE RIVER WILL FLOOD THE BANK



a place we have almost been, where a
memory, muddy, mixes with the dream.
you wake up, panicked, gasping.

a divine thing beckons.

it lives in the almost, the
mostly gone.
you can join it if you'd like.

i grow weary. i grow weak. i think it's time for me to
leave.

i grow weary. i grow weak. i think it's time for me to
leave.

i grow weary. i grow weak. i think it's time for me to
leave.

i grow weary. i grow weak. i think it's time for me to
leave.

i grow weary. i grow weak. i think it's time for me to
leave.

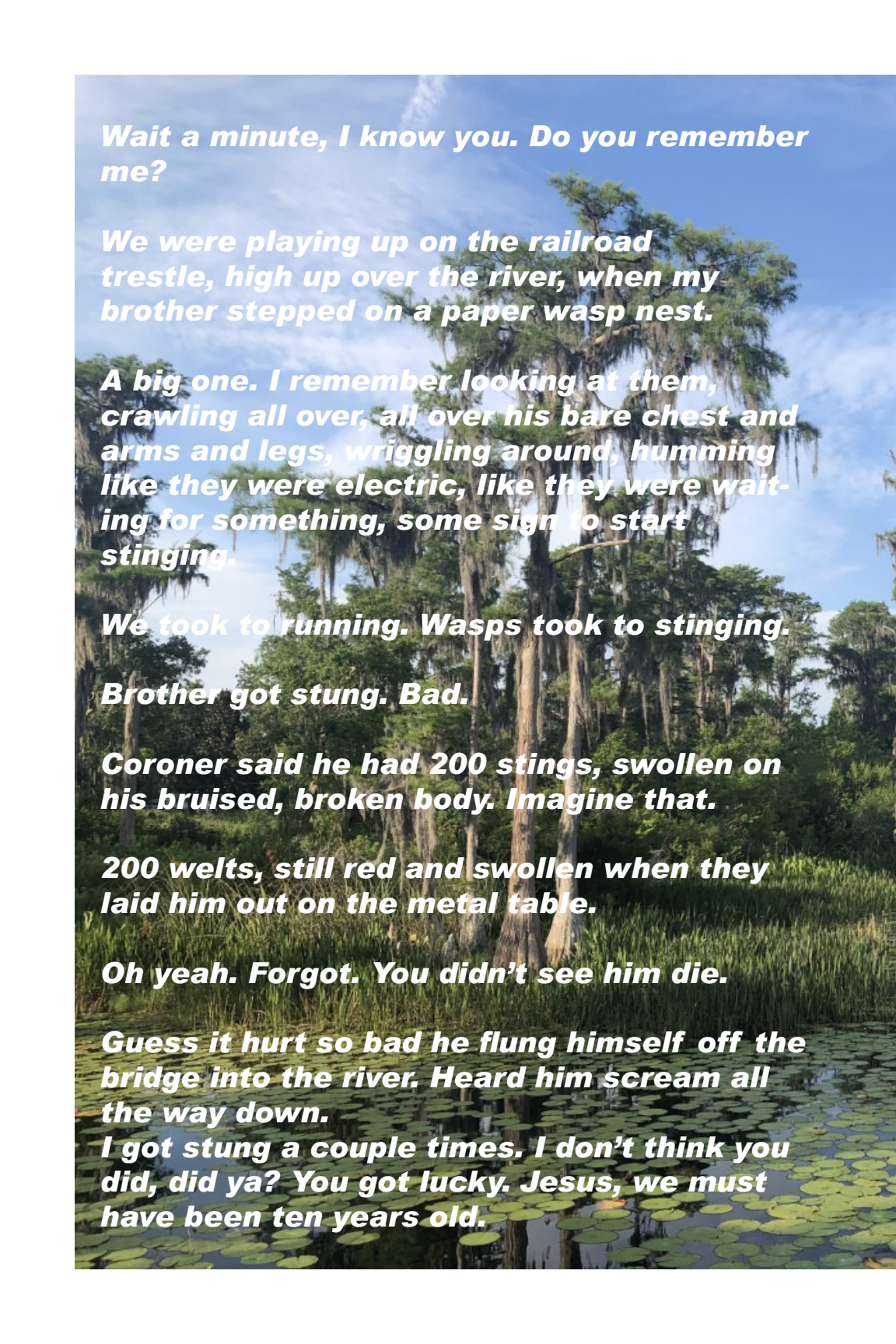
i grow weary. i grow weak. i think it's time for me to

*in my dreams, you are the
last living light of the world
and you pass through my
house with a quiet hush.
my alone screams out,
tears it all apart, searches
for you.*

*every night you are already
gone.*

*can't you just stay? for one
night?
can't you heal?
just once?*





Wait a minute, I know you. Do you remember me?

We were playing up on the railroad trestle, high up over the river, when my brother stepped on a paper wasp nest.

A big one. I remember looking at them, crawling all over, all over his bare chest and arms and legs, wriggling around, humming like they were electric, like they were waiting for something, some sign to start stinging.

We took to running. Wasps took to stinging.

Brother got stung. Bad.

Coroner said he had 200 stings, swollen on his bruised, broken body. Imagine that.

200 welts, still red and swollen when they laid him out on the metal table.

Oh yeah. Forgot. You didn't see him die.

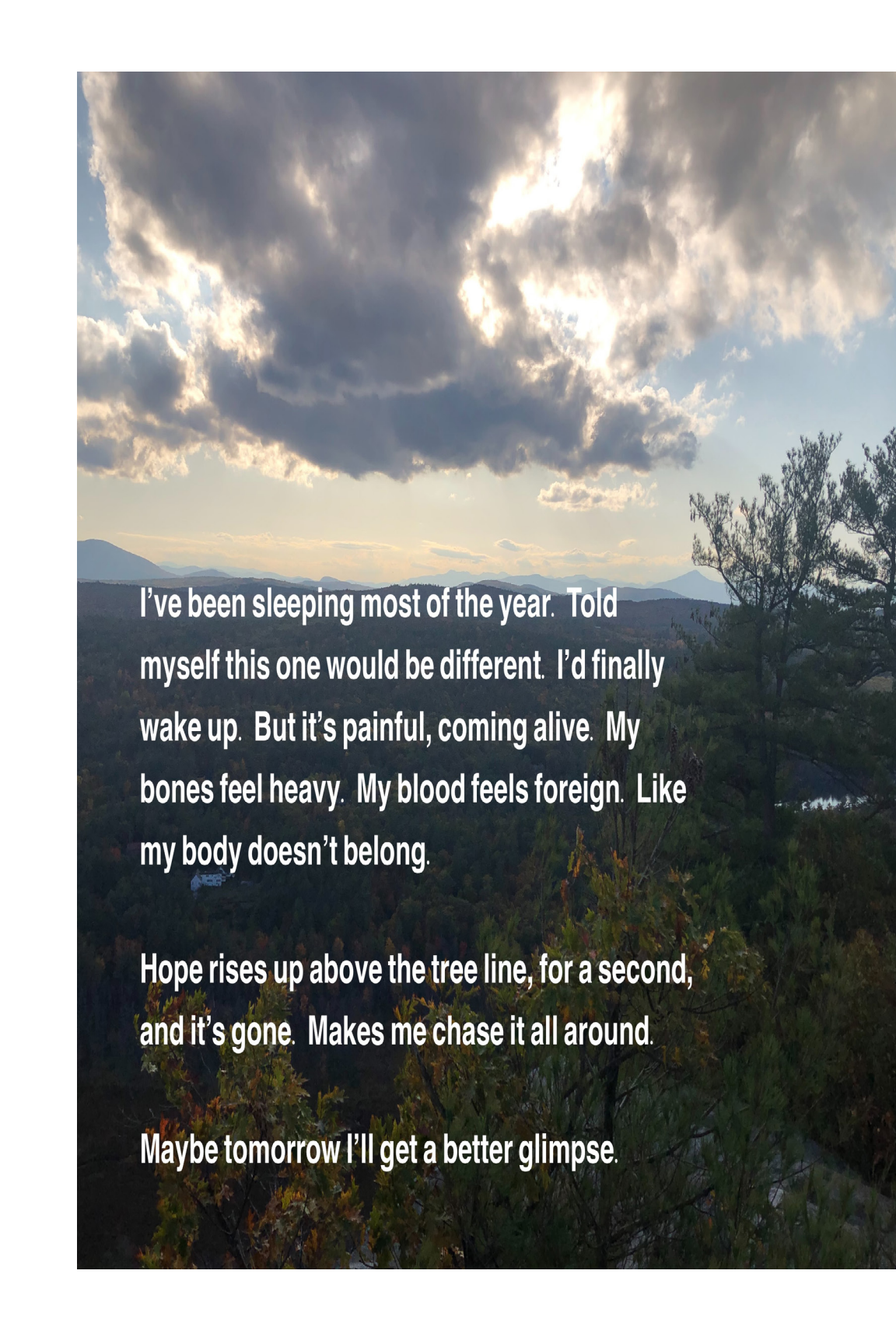
Guess it hurt so bad he flung himself off the bridge into the river. Heard him scream all the way down.

I got stung a couple times. I don't think you did, did ya? You got lucky. Jesus, we must have been ten years old.



Do you remember? When he was standing there, with the wasps, how the crows kept circling? Jesus, it's like they knew.

He was crying, kept begging us to get the wasps off of him, but there wasn't nothing we could do, right? Once the wasps got to stinging, it could have been us, right? When they found him, downriver a ways, his waterlogged skin was blue and bloated and puffed and his eyes were swollen shut. We couldn't have helped him none, right?



I've been sleeping most of the year. Told
myself this one would be different. I'd finally
wake up. But it's painful, coming alive. My
bones feel heavy. My blood feels foreign. Like
my body doesn't belong.

Hope rises up above the tree line, for a second,
and it's gone. Makes me chase it all around.

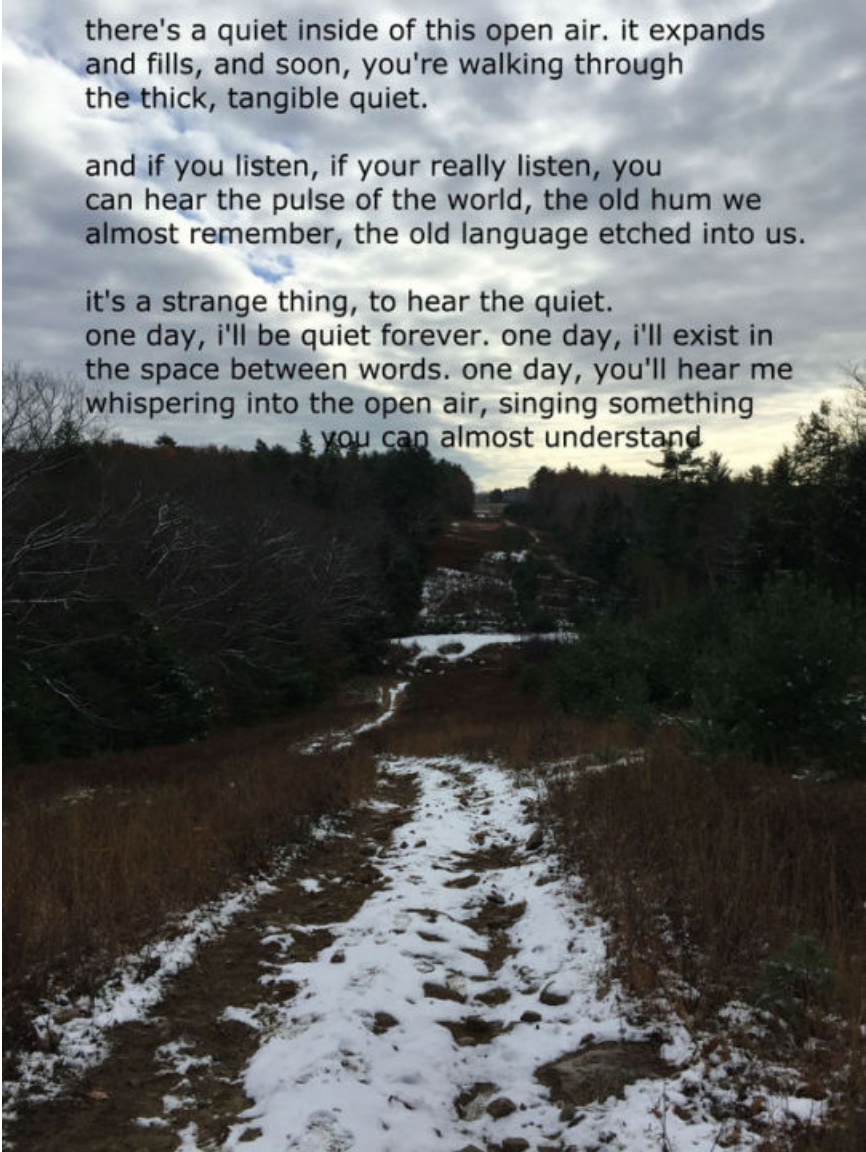
Maybe tomorrow I'll get a better glimpse.

how are you doing? are you enjoying yourself? are you having a good time? what can be done to help you? how are you doing? are you enjoying yourself? are you having a good time? what can be done to help you? how are you doing? are you enjoying yourself? how are you?

there's a quiet inside of this open air. it expands and fills, and soon, you're walking through the thick, tangible quiet.

and if you listen, if you really listen, you can hear the pulse of the world, the old hum we almost remember, the old language etched into us.

it's a strange thing, to hear the quiet.
one day, i'll be quiet forever. one day, i'll exist in the space between words. one day, you'll hear me whispering into the open air, singing something you can almost understand





*When this city woke up, I fell asleep, mourning the
fullness of the streets.
when the sky rose up, all pink, orange, and purple,
I saw my own disease festering in the clouds.*

*Ghosts in the brick sing with
the old, forgotten hum of this
ancient engine,
saying, 'We remember the hot mill steam.'*

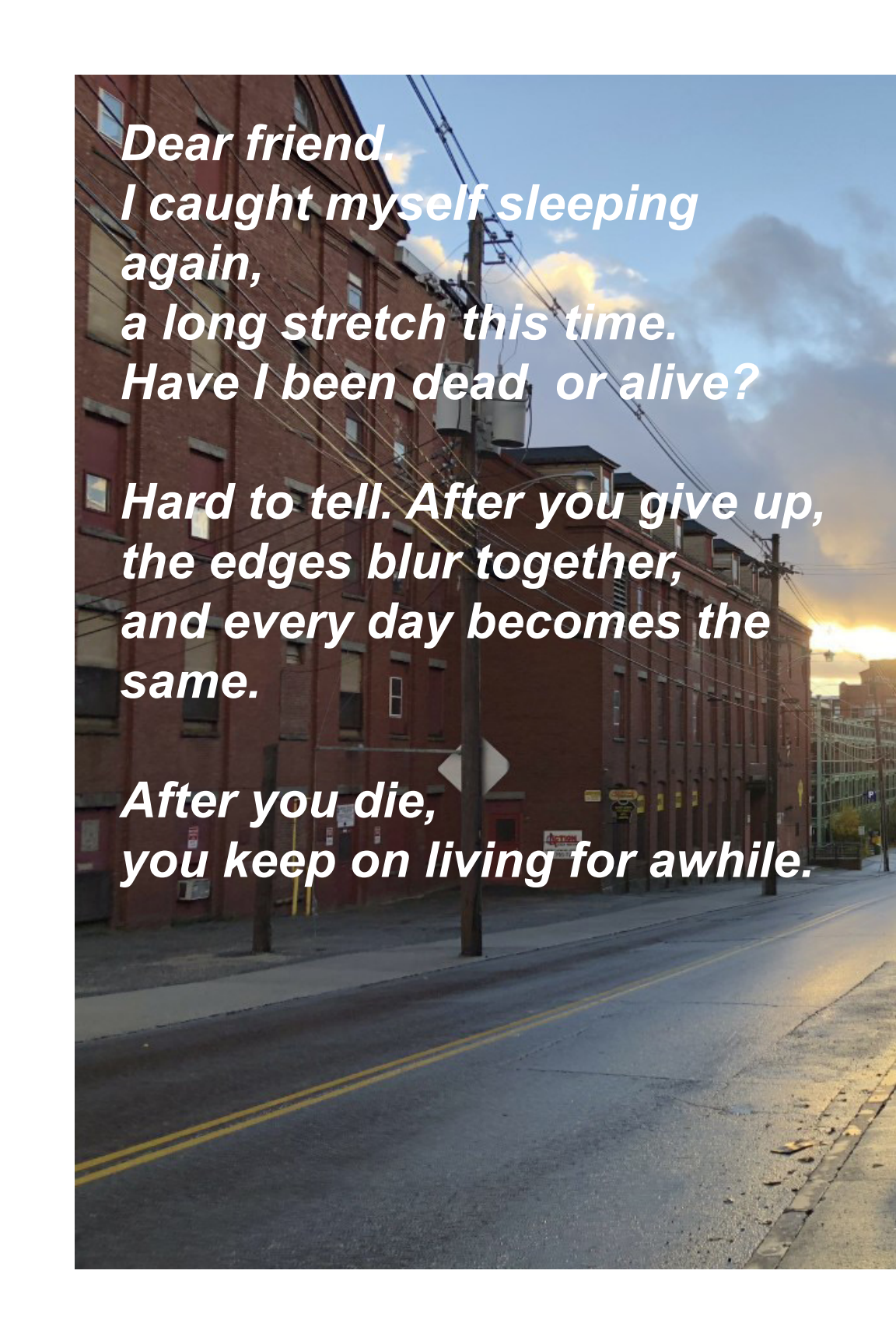
We remember how it rolled into the sky
and faded into the air like breath
on a cold morning.



The pastoral fantasy, the
want to maybe not die
tomorrow, living in the
flash, the siren wailing,
the calm of the land and
the braying of the beast



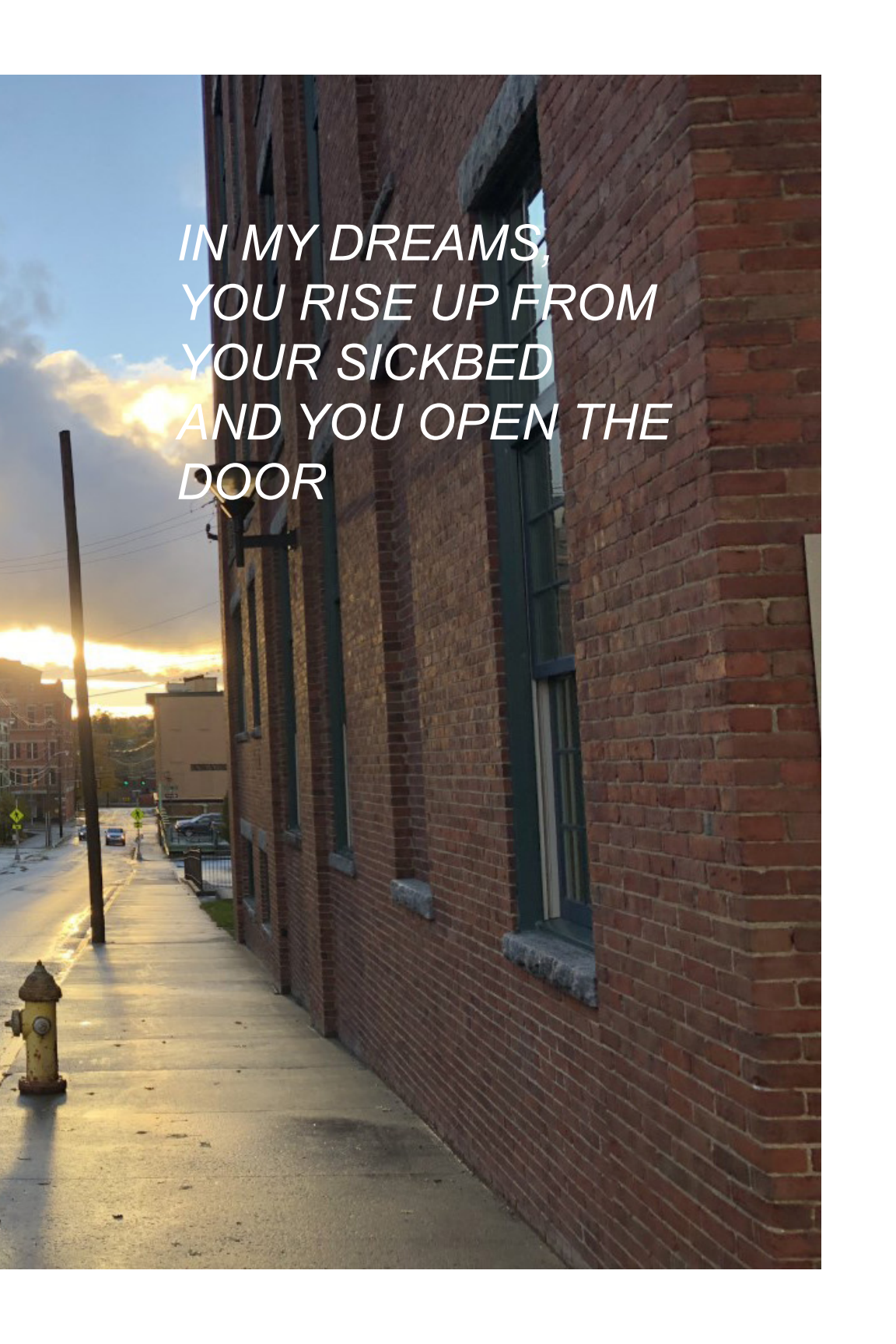
we are always leaving things behind
why not leave it all
at once



*Dear friend.
I caught myself sleeping
again,
a long stretch this time.
Have I been dead or alive?*

*Hard to tell. After you give up,
the edges blur together,
and every day becomes the
same.*

*After you die,
you keep on living for awhile.*



*IN MY DREAMS,
YOU RISE UP FROM
YOUR SICKBED
AND YOU OPEN THE
DOOR*

A full-page photograph of a seascape. In the foreground, dark, jagged rocks are partially submerged in churning, greyish water. The water has white foam and ripples, suggesting a strong current or storm. In the middle ground, several small boats are visible on the horizon. The background shows a distant shoreline with trees under a vast, cloudy sky. The clouds are heavy and grey, with some lighter patches where the sun might be breaking through.

leaving is easy.

the hard part is never coming back.

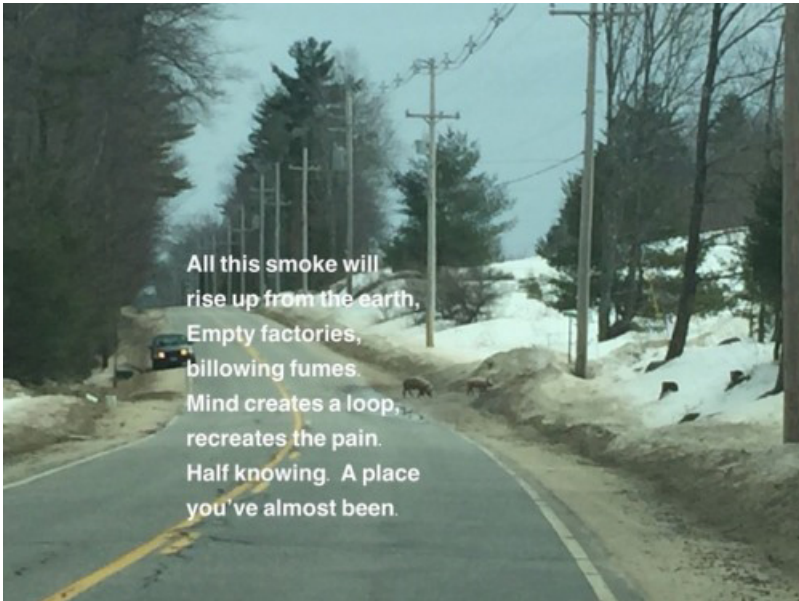


I saw a flash of the last hour. Empty factories. Steam rises up for the last time; ancient fires
rip through the cities.

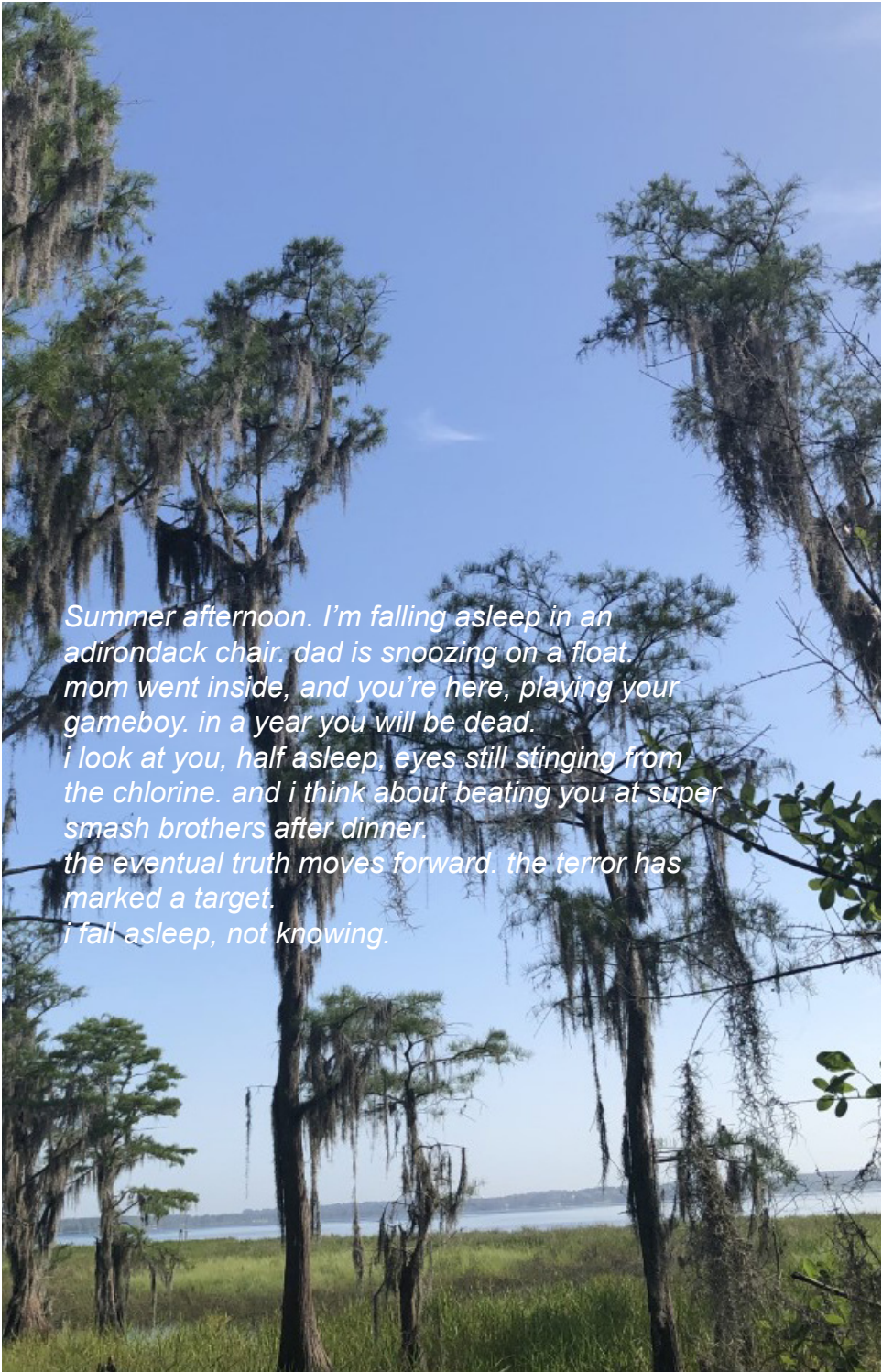
We created this shadow, and lived inside it, moving all around.
When it finally comes, we will all crumble in the light.



This body, failing and foreign,
blares new sirens everyday.
A new panic furrows deep
down.
Numbed to dust on the stone
of the world.



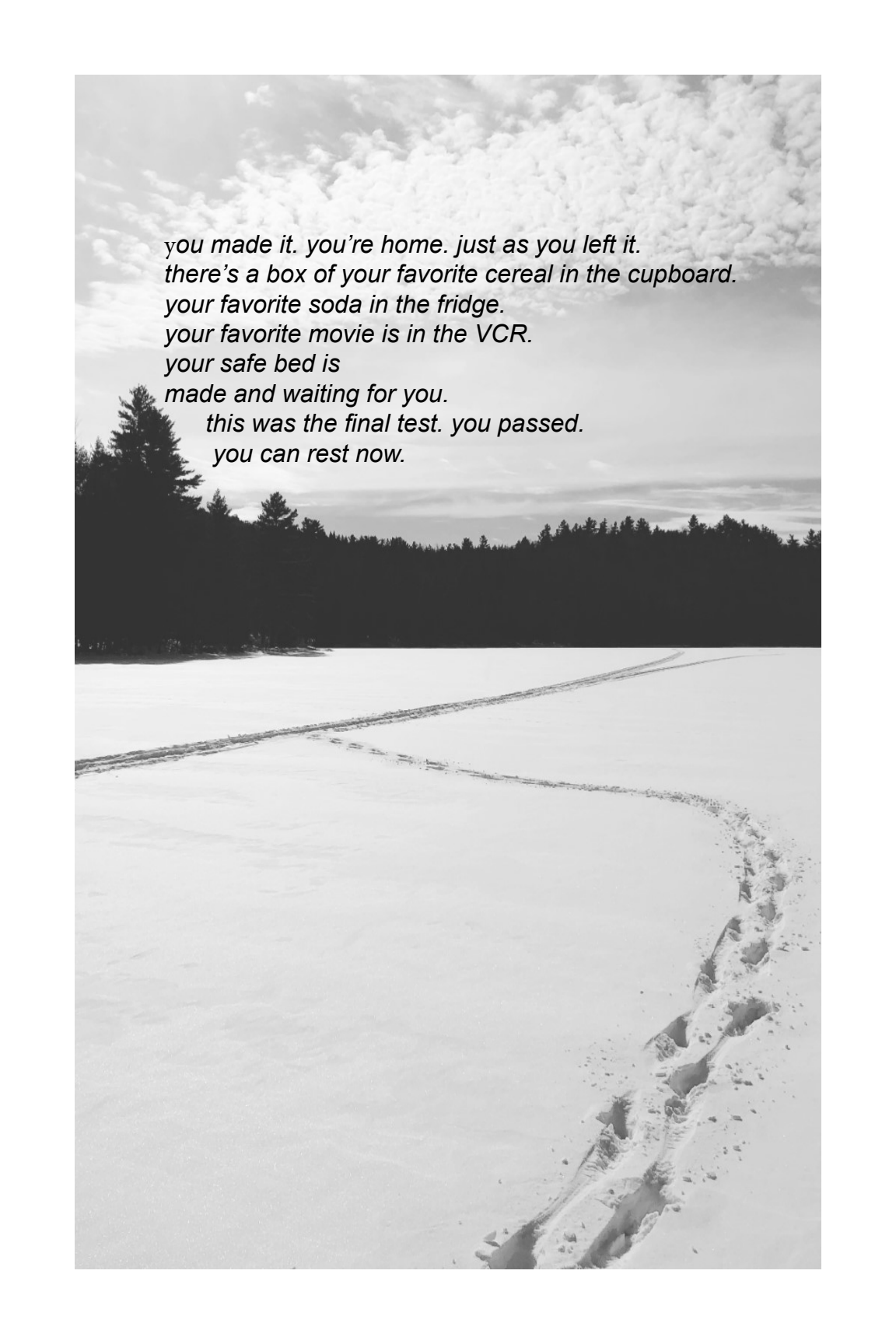
All this smoke will
rise up from the earth,
Empty factories,
billowing fumes.
Mind creates a loop,
recreates the pain.
Half knowing. A place
you've almost been.



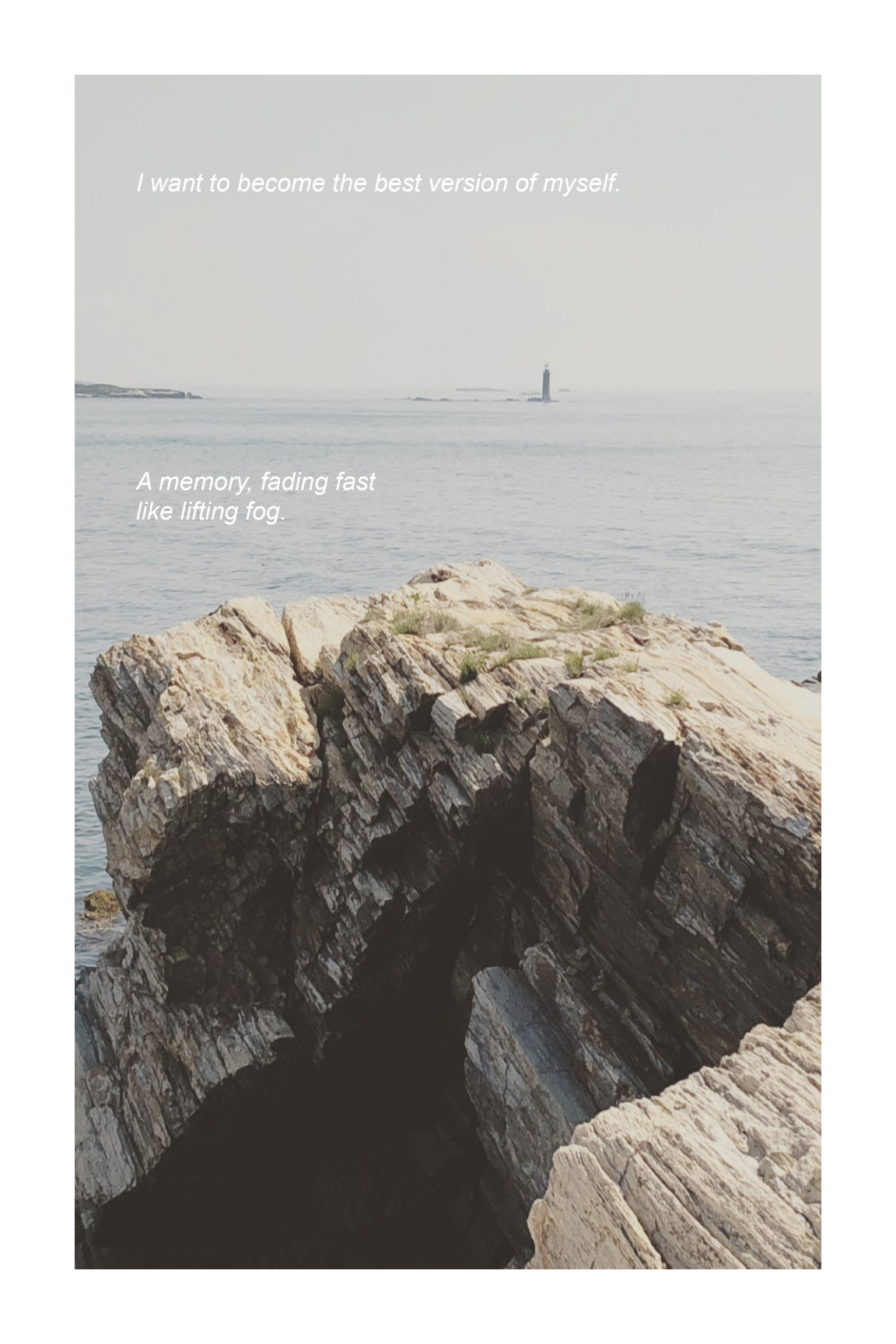
*Summer afternoon. I'm falling asleep in an
adirondack chair. dad is snoozing on a float.
mom went inside, and you're here, playing your
gameboy. in a year you will be dead.
i look at you, half asleep, eyes still stinging from
the chlorine. and i think about beating you at super
smash brothers after dinner.
the eventual truth moves forward. the terror has
marked a target.
i fall asleep, not knowing.*

the soft rain, a gate to oblivion. you hold a careful secret in your palm. A salve to spread on wounds. Rain taps down, opens a portal.
You've really known this all along.



A black and white photograph of a snowy landscape. In the foreground, a path of footprints leads from the bottom right towards the center. The middle ground is a vast, flat expanse of snow. In the background, a dark line of evergreen trees stretches across the horizon under a sky filled with soft, white clouds.

*you made it. you're home. just as you left it.
there's a box of your favorite cereal in the cupboard.
your favorite soda in the fridge.
your favorite movie is in the VCR.
your safe bed is
made and waiting for you.
this was the final test. you passed.
you can rest now.*

A photograph of a coastal scene. In the foreground, there are large, layered, light-colored rocks with some small green plants growing on them. The rocks are dark and shadowed in some places. In the background, the ocean is calm and blue, with a small lighthouse visible on the horizon. The sky is a pale, hazy blue.

I want to become the best version of myself.

*A memory, fading fast
like lifting fog.*

here is a list of things that cannot be changed;
that which has been seen. those that have died.
that which was lost with death.

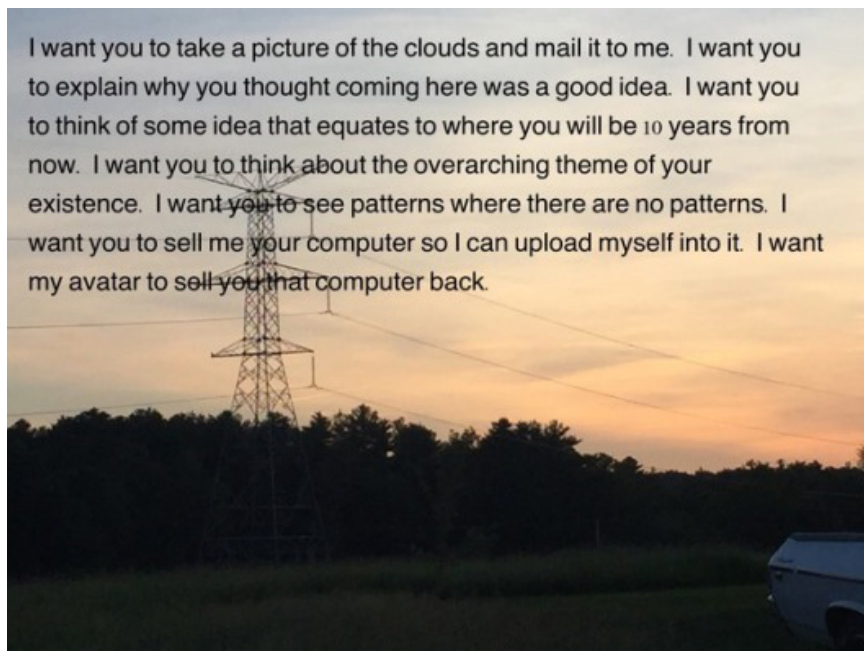
and i have seen crushing. violence piled up
on my chest, stone after stone, each building,
the eventual caving of the body.

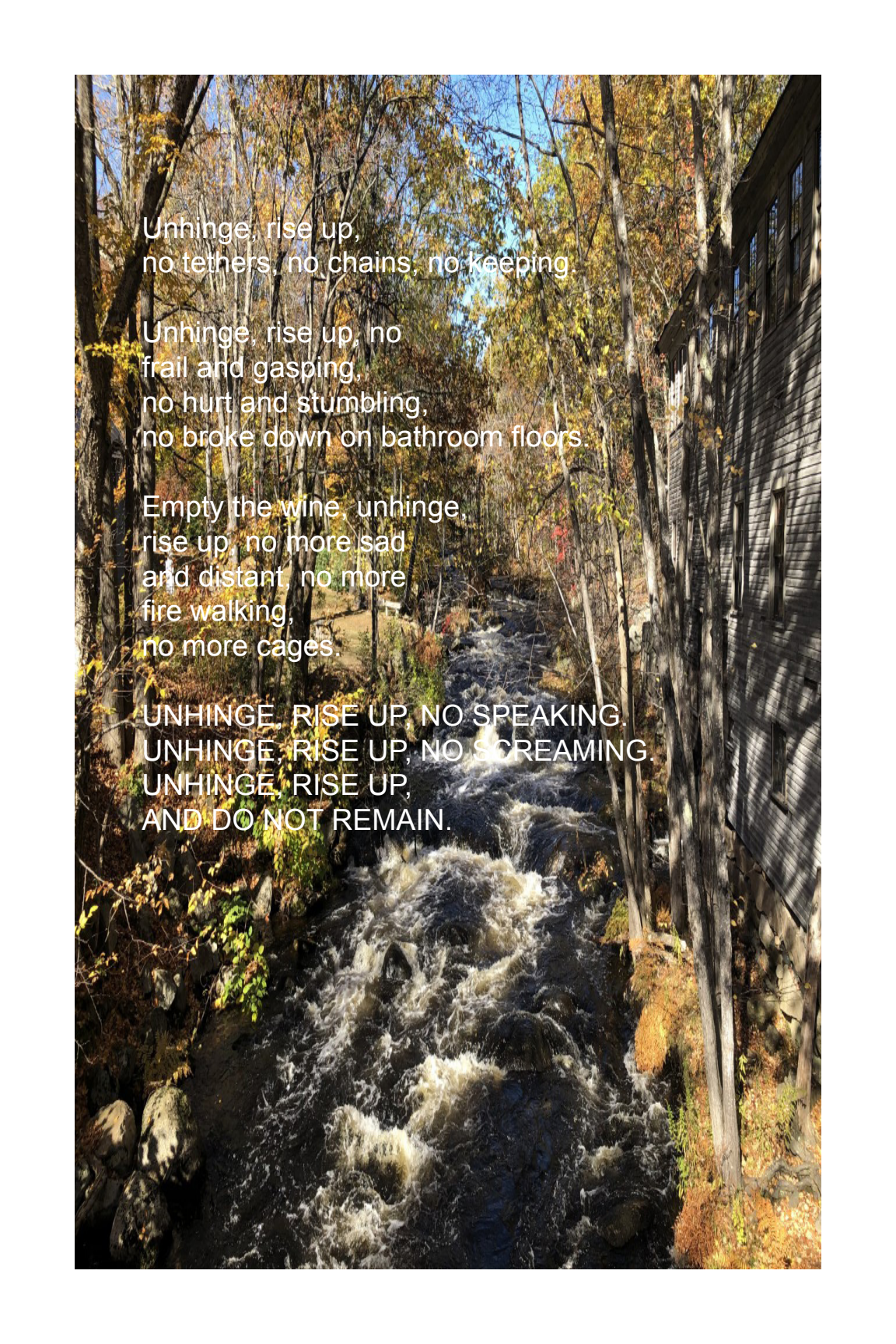
if i could carve myself, make myself unwhole
as if to save you, as if to bring you back from the inbetween
where you cannot see, where what you have seen
was lost with the ending of your body

what is missed? what will not be found again? what going has
gone?

friends, why have you
left?

why is this my home? dreams that do not make
sense. an algorithm of sadness knows, calculations,





Unhinge, rise up,
no tethers, no chains, no keeping.

Unhinge, rise up, no
frail and gasping,
no hurt and stumbling,
no broke down on bathroom floors.

Empty the wine, unhinge,
rise up, no more sad
and distant, no more
fire walking,
no more cages.

UNHINGE, RISE UP, NO SPEAKING.
UNHINGE, RISE UP, NO SCREAMING.
UNHINGE, RISE UP,
AND DO NOT REMAIN.



you missed it. it was beautiful. all the lights went out
at once. when they came back on, everything was
gone.
then, you showed up. i was hoping you would. thank
you
for being here. you're the only one.

*Your childhood dog is alive.
Your dead best friend wants to get coffee.
You have been kind and good.
There is nothing chasing you.
You can sleep.
What do you do?*



**THIS IS THE ENDING WHERE YOU FINALLY FIND
YOUR WAY HOME AND THE ANCIENT TERROR INSIDE OF
YOU IS STOMPED OUT FOR GOOD.**